

Let's Settle This

By Jack Ritchie

NOTE: This story won the \$100 2nd prize in the Chicago Daily Tribune's story contest on Saturday, November 6th, 1954. It was never published.

Evelyn Wheatly looked up as the junior Mr. James Vaughan, as yet unlisted in the law firm of Vaughan & Bensen, came to her desk. "I like walking in the rain," she said.

"I hate it," Jimmy Vaughan said. "Beside, my raincoat leaks."

"I love to travel," Evelyn said, trying again.

Jimmy picked up the briefs Evelyn had finished typing. "Late at night when I hear the lonesome whistle of a freight train, I have an overwhelming compulsion to remain exactly where I am."

He paged through the sheets. "It's apparent that we have absolutely nothing in common. Cease and desist."

Evelyn tilted her blonde head for thought. "I'm committing myself first, which leaves you a way out. Let me put it this way. Do you or do you not like onions on your hamburgers?"

Jimmy smiled triumphantly. "I don't eat hamburgers." And then Mr. James Vaughan, Jr., who didn't mind walking in the rain, liked a moderate amount of travel, and was enthusiastic about hamburgers with onions, turned and went into his father's office.

The senior Vaughan accepted the briefs. "That's a good boy," he said.

Jimmy sank into a chair. "This may shock you, Dad," he said. "But I know where the courthouse is and I can talk as loud as any other lawyer. I have the wild idea that you can trust me with something besides making out wills."

"Just sit there and absorb experience," Mr. Vaughan said. "In a moment I'll think

up some sage advice."

Mr. Vaughan read the briefs and said, "Hmm!" wisely several times. Then he put them aside and woke Jimmy from a reverie that might have been a doze.

"Speaking of Evelyn," he said, "why don't you marry her? Speaking for myself, it's all I can do to keep from whistling when I look at her. And I'm a married man, you know."

Jimmy got up. "I suggest I go out to lunch," he said.

When Jimmy returned to the office at one, he noticed a large vase of roses on Evelyn's desk.

"Look what I got," Evelyn said. "Want to read the card?"

"It's a trick," Jimmy said. "You sent them to yourself. I refuse to get jealous."

"I met him last night," Evelyn said. "He's calling for me at quitting time. Notice the dreamy look in my eyes?"

"It's no use," Jimmy said stubbornly. "I see through it all. A brother. Possibly a nephew."

Evelyn rolled paper into her machine. "Now run along and deliver a writ or something."

His father looked up as he entered the office. "Here's something you might be able to handle. A Mr. Hanson got arrested for speeding. I told him to plead guilty and pay the ten-dollar fine, but he wants to make a case out of it."

Jimmy sighed and sat down to study the details. At five o'clock he woke and stretched. He walked into the outer office and promptly stopped in his tracks.

The man helping Evelyn into her coat was no brother of hers, nor nephew either. Jimmy recognized him as Eddie Conley, one of his classmates in law school.

Jimmy went back into the office and began to think.

In the morning Traffic Court, Jimmy did his pre-occupied best. Mr. Hanson was found guilty and fined twenty-five dollars and costs.

That afternoon Jimmy studied his frown in the mirror in his Dad's office.

His father observed sympathetically and wondered whether he should put his arm around his son's shoulders. "Never mind," he said finally. "Hanson's case was hopeless anyhow."

"Who's Hanson?" his son inquired absently.

"That's it. Try to forget." Mr. Vaughan examined some papers on his desk. "Now here's something that should turn out better. Fellow named Conklin ran over one of my clients. My client is considerably miffed and he wants ten thousand dollars." He chuckled gleefully. "Watch how I handle it, boy. I bet we settle for nearly a thousand."

Jimmy listened with minimal interest and then wandered out of the office and up against Eddie Conley.

"Nice to see you again, Jimmy," Conley said. "I heard you were in court today."

Jimmy blushed for himself and then glowered as he noticed that Evelyn watched them.

"I'm representing Conklin," Eddie said. "Is your father handling the case?"

"I'm handling it," Jimmy said fiercely. "We sue. I'll hire a lawyer if necessary."

Conley smiled. "My client, while not admitting any responsibility, nevertheless would like to settle this matter amicably. He thinks that five hundred dollars should cover the matter nicely."

"Ha!" Jimmy said, his lip curling in contempt.

Conley laughed professionally. "Perhaps we might make it a thousand. But that's the absolute limit."

Jimmy folded his arms across his chest

and became bored. "Ten thousand. Cash, check, or money order."

For fifteen minutes he leaned against a desk and yawned away all offers until the bid stood at five thousand. At that point he allowed himself to be convinced and led Conley into his father's office for the drawing up of the necessary papers.

When Conley was gone, Jimmy swaggered over to Evelyn's desk. "I feel confidence throbbing within me," he said.

"You were magnificent," Evelyn said.

"I know," Jimmy admitted. "Is Conley supposed to pick you up again tonight?"

"Naturally," Evelyn said. "I think he's handsome, don't you?"

"You are on the verge of getting fired. So watch it," Jimmy said evenly. He put both hands on her desk and leaned forward. "Fifteen minutes before he's due to call for you, you and I will leave for dinner together. The time element is important because he's bigger than I am."

Evelyn looked into his eyes and smiled. "You do realize what this will probably lead to?"

"Too well. But I'm game," Jimmy said. "My intentions are honorable, but interesting."

He leaned forward somewhat more.

Beside the keyhole of his office door, Mr. Vaughan waited a minute more before he got to his feet. "Never could understand why women close their eyes when they're being kissed." He looked over the Conklin agreement, tore it up and threw it into the wastepaper basket.

He hobbled to the phone and dialed his printer. "That's right," he said. "A new letterhead. It's Vaughan, Bensen, & Vaughan now. My boy passed both tests. And while you're at it, Mr. Conley, thank your boy, Eddie. I'll throw some business his way when I can. With that acting ability he ought to make a great lawyer." ◆